

[You can't tell by lookin']

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Wednesday, Feb. 1 "You can't tall by lookin' at a cat's tail how far he'll jump," remarks Mr Botsford. We are discussing that innate quality in human nature which enables mankind to rise to heroic heights in the face of emergency.

"You take Laura Coe. She worked down to the Clock shop office years ago when I was a young feller. She was as plump, purty a little thing as you'd find in a day's walk. Put you in mind of a kitten. You wouldn't think she could ever turn her hand to anything, unless it might be knittin' or fancy work.

"Lots of the young fellers made up to her, but she wouldn't have anything to do with any of them. Not serious, that is. She come from a firm over around Cheshire-way. Wellsir, her father died at last, and there wasn't no one to take care of the place. What do you think that girl did? She gave up her nice easy job in the office and went home and run that farm. Took care of her mother and run that farm. Did it just as good as her father did, too.

'they say there's somethin' about farmin' that kind of gets hold of you. If you got it in your blood, you'll go back some day I don't know. My father was bound out on a farm when he was a young feller, but he never had no hankerin' to go back to it.

"But I knew another case. There was an old feller up in Northfield named Daddy Andrews. He had a son George, used to clerk down to Miller and Peck's in Waterbury. George was kind of a dude. Used to dress right in the latest fashion all the time. You'd think he was

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a millionaire. Never think he come from a village like Northfield. All the women used to like to have him wait on them when they went into the store. Old Man Andrews got old and blind, and George give up his job and 2 come home to the farm. He put all his good clothes away and commenced to dress like a farmer—overalls and felt boots and all—and in a few weeks time you wouldn't have knowed it was the same feller. He never went back to the store. Stayed on the farm all his life.

“Then there was a girl I knew in Milford. She used to have a school-teachin' job down to New Haven. She got 'way up in her job, had one of the highest jobs in the school. But I went over to her father's farm for a visit one time, and there she was out in the barn, shovelin' out manure, and dressed in an old pair of overalls. Look at her then and you'd never think she was a teacher. You wouldn't think she'd ever got off the farm.”

Mr. Botsford stuffs some “Granger” into his blackened pipe, lights it and puffs contentedly.

“Farmers,” he says,” farmers. Some of the finest men this town ever had was farmers. And some of the most successful. A man's got the stuff to make a farm run, and he can run most anything. Some of the finest men in this here country was farmers. Abe Lincoln. He must have been a wonderful man. They had a piece on the radio the other night about him. Lionel Barrymore took the part of Lincoln You know that story of the boy who was supposed to be shot, and Lincoln pardoned him? It was fine, fine. That Barrymore is a great actor.

“Say, you don't mind if I turn it on now, do you? The radio, I mean. There's a program I want to hear.” Mr Botsford fiddles with the dial for a few seconds and gets his program. It has already begun, the interview of a famous Arctic explorer who has just finished writing a book “Unsolved Mysteries of the Arctic.”

“That's the 'Voice of Experience’ doin' the interview,” explains Mr. Botsford. The 'Voice' pops questions at the explorer, who it seems, has in bygone days been a fellow lecturer on the Chatauqua circuit. 3 The book is energetically plugged by the 'Voice,' and at the

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conclusion of the program, Mr. Botsford says: "I'd like to read that book. That's the kind of a program I like, somethin' educational.

"Just imagine that lad livin' five and a half years up there in the Arctic. Hear what he said? They didn't mind the cold, if they was dressed for it.

"I suppose it was dry up there. That's why the cold down around this section seems to get right into your bones. It ain't dry. We live in the coastal area. That's a strip of land about thirty five miles in width—out from the coast. Ever notice how much differenc there is in two temperatures in Torrington and Winsted? This town is right on the edge of the coastal area, you see. Then Torrington, is just outside. That's why there's such a big difference in the temperatures up that way.

"Then when you get up to the foothills of the Berkshires it gets colder yet, but it's dry. You can stand a dry cold a hell of a lot better. Like up in the Adirondacks. Old Dave Mix was a guide up there. He used to take us around every summer. He told me once that he used to chop wood in his shirt, with the temperature forty below. Said it was a dry cold, and you could do it, as long as you stayed in the woods. But he said, if you tried to cross the lake that way—with nothin' on your back but a shirt—you'd freeze to death. See what I mean?

"He was quite a feller, was old Dave. He knew more about woods and nature and game than any man I ever see. He was always promisin, me a dinner of venison. Finally one time I dropped him a card, just before I went up. 'How about that Mountain Goat?' I says. When I got there, he had it. 4 "He brought it down from his icehouse all wrapped up in newspaper, a great big chunk. He laid it down on a table, and took out his huntin' knife, and began to peel it. The top meat was as black as coal, and ripe. It smelled pretty bad. But finally he got it all cut away, and down underneath the meat was blood-red and juicy. Then he went out and got a big armful of white maple, cut in widths about like a broomstick. It was such nice lookin' wood it seemed a shame to burn it. But he made a

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fire with it, and when he had a bed of good hot embers, Mattie—that was his wife—she brought in a couple of big grills, and he put the venison on and let it roast.

“Twenty three of us sat down to it. And boy, it was good. 'Course it's got a little gamey taste, but not bad. If it's cured right, you wouldn't notice it. They hang it up in trees and leave it be. In the winter time, they leave it stay there for months.”

A knock at the door interrupts Mr. Botsford. “What the hell?” he says. He opens the door and a hatless young man carrying a sample case clears his throat nervously and begins his sales talk: “I'm Steinagle the Fuller Brush man. You've probably used our products. We're giving away a free brush to customers as a special—”

“I've used 'em, says Mr. Botsford; “but I don't want none now. I'm by myself here. I don't have much use for fancy brushes.”

“Well,” says the young man feebly, “well—” The exact formula for the present emergency has apparently escaped him. Mr. Botsford is slowly closing the door. In desperation, the salesman thrusts a booklet into his hand. “There's our latest line,” he says. “If you change your mind, you can give me a ring. My phone number is right on there.”

“Well, if I need any—” Mr Botsford closes the door. “That's a pretty hard way to make a linin',” he says. “I used to buy them when my aunt 5 was with me here, but good Lord, what do I want with a lot of fancy brushes now? What was we talkin' about? Venison, wasn't it?

“Folks around here don't know how to cure it, or how to prepare it. That's another change of the past thirty-forty years. When I was a young feller they knew how. They knew a lot more about preservin' food than they do now, because they had to know it. You couldn't go down to the store and buy anything you was a mind to. You did your own butcherin' and you cured the meat yourself. You salted it down and put it away for the winter.

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"My father butchered the hog every year, and cut it up and cured it himself. He'd cut the hams out and put them into an old barrel and build a fire in it and smoke them. He'd buy a quarter of beef sometimes, and cut it up on a long table down cellar and not waste a damn bit of it either. Cut off strips and hang it up to dry. Make soap out of the fat.

"Most everybody had a pig and a cow and chickens. Don't any more. Even the tobacco farmers over around Hartford don't keep any livestock and don't have a garden. What do you think of that? They buy all their stuff from other farmers or from the stores

"You can preserve anything if you know how I remember once my father and two three other fellers went spearin' suckers over Watertown way. The suckers was so thick they laid down their spears and got right in the brook and threw them out with their bare hands. Then they made stringers and carried 'em down to the road. But they got so many they couldn't tote 'em home without help so they went down the road and woke up old Jim Hotchkiss—Ed Hotchkiss' father—and he got out the wagon and hitched up and drove 'em home. I remember the next day, they had the fish in big tubs out in the back yard. They salted it down and we had salt fish aplenty that winter. 6 "Yessir, things change, don't they? No more cow and pig and chickens in the back yard. The barns all got automobiles in them now. You goin, are you? I ain't been down town today yet, myself, but I was down yesterday, and I was down Monday, in all the snow. There was one of them big trailer trucks skidded across the road up on Plymouth Hill and none of the cars could get by. Had traffic blocked for about an hour, but finally they got the thing straightened around and cars could get through. It was quite a sight. I walked over to see it. Well, come up again. I can stand it, if you can."